



Press Contact:
Bill Conn
bill@scribewise.com
215.429.3579

Ability Network of Delaware's Response to Governor Carney's Proposed FY 2023 State Budget – Delaware's Human Services Need to Be a Higher Priority

Investments in the human services infrastructure have not kept pace with the state's health and social service needs for the last 14 years, a trend that must be reversed.

WILMINGTON, Del. – January 27, 2022 – In a statement issued by the Ability Network of Delaware (A.N.D.), Executive Director Thomas Cook called on the General Assembly to add funding to Governor Carney's recommended Fiscal Year 2023 budget, to continue rebuilding the human service infrastructure in Delaware.

The ongoing workforce crisis in services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) caused by chronic underfunding has worsened due to COVID-related staff shortages, as demonstrated by a survey of Delaware providers conducted at the end of 2021 by the Department of Health and Social Servicesⁱ. This study found:

- 28% of providers were missing between 20-30% of their total workforce
- 30% were missing between a third and a half of their total workforce
- 50% have not been able to accept new referrals
- 25% have been unable to welcome back all existing service recipients
- 11% permanently closed a program site, decreasing their overall service capacity

In a separate national survey conducted by the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)ⁱⁱ in August 2021, the findings revealed that providers were struggling to meet community needs, with 86.2% saying that Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) had "wages (that) are lower than income provided by unemployment or other state or federal safety net benefits" and 47.7% saying that "DSPs who left their positions temporarily due to the pandemic are not yet able to return (e.g., because their children's schools remain closed, because of fear of contracting COVID-19, etc.)."

This workforce crisis, which is being experienced by all human service providers in Delaware, has jeopardized the health of people with disabilities; people requiring treatment for mental health and substance use disorders; and the families of people needing services.

"The Ability Network of Delaware thanks the Joint Finance Committee, the leadership of the General Assembly, and the Governor for the increase in funding granted in 2021 to services for people with

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I/DD," said Thomas Cook, Executive Director of the Ability Network of Delaware. "However, we are still tens of millions of dollars short of where the state government's own studyⁱⁱⁱ says we must be. We need to aggressively build on the progress to date, so that we can fill staff vacancies that are at an all-time high. Therefore, we are asking the General Assembly to fully I/DD services.

"We applaud the inclusion in the Governor's Recommended Budget of \$900,000 for increasing rates paid for Medication Assisted Treatment. We also have learned that it would take another \$1.5 million to fully fund the recommendations made in the recently completed rate study for other community-based treatment services. We must dramatically increase funding for the treatment of substance use disorders, which will help reduce the state's unacceptably high drug overdose death rate.

"In addition to these two areas that need better funding, it has become increasingly clear during the pandemic that the underfunding of other human services impacts the ability of all service providers to recruit and retain DSPs. There are people who would find working in the human service field rewarding, but who are unable to accept a job as a DSP because of the lack of availability or affordability of childcare and/or senior care. We are supportive of the increases in the Governor's Recommended Budget for childcare providers and their workers. The state needs to make sure that everyone who wants to be an essential caregiver has the support needed to go to work. Increases in reimbursement to personal care attendants would help accomplish that goal.

"Failing to properly fund all human services not only has a negative effect on the lives of many people in the state of Delaware, it also is a drag on the state's economy, because the good health of our state's economy depends on the health of our citizenry," said Cook. "It's up to the Joint Finance Committee, the leadership of the General Assembly and the Governor to take the steps needed to make human services a higher priority in next year's state budget."

About the Ability Network of Delaware

By uniting and focusing on what we can achieve together, the Ability Network of Delaware (A.N.D.) builds strength across Delaware's disability and behavioral health communities. As a statewide membership association of community service providers, A.N.D. works to strengthen and connect them. Membership is open to organizations that provide direct services, advocacy and/or educational services to Delawareans who benefit from community-based services and their families.

www.abilitynetworkde.org.

ⁱ "Summary Results of DDDS Staff Vacancy Survey," a report from the office of the Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services published January 25, 2022.

ⁱⁱ "New Research Finds COVID-19 Pandemic Further Decimating a Direct Care Workforce in Crisis," an issue briefing on "The State of America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis 2021." downloaded on January 25, 2022 from: <https://www.ancor.org/newsroom/news/results-are-and-america%E2%80%99s-direct-support-workforce-crisis-only-getting-worse>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "2019 Direct Support Professional Rate Rebase Study," Division of Developmental Disabilities, found at: <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/ddds/files/2019ratestudydoc1.pdf>